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HARVEY HILL, Publisher

JOHN KELLEHER, Managing Editor

PATRICK O' GRADY, Local News Editor

A new county jail?

The Sullivan County delegation is looking at the possibility of a new jail that will cost upwards of \$40 million.

No doubt that will result in howls of protest from people who think that is a lot of money to house people who have broken the law — or at least are accused of breaking the law. The idea of spending that much money is cause for concern.

But the existing prison seems inadequate to handle the existing numbers of criminals who are sentenced there, and if projections are right, the inmate population is likely to increase in coming years.

And our biggest concern is not for the inmates — though if we are to incarcerate people, we are responsible for their safekeeping — but for the staff. The staff — employees of the taxpayers — guards the criminals, feeds them and maintains the building. Our county is much safer because of their work.

When jails are packed as tight as they are now, workers and inmates are put at risk. Crowded conditions create a tinderbox. Newer jails provide staff with more resources to handle the ever-increasing number of dangerous inmates.

But what alternatives are there to building a new jail.

Some pop to mind.

Can the existing jail be renovated to meet modern penal requirements?

Can a new jail be built for less?

Are there ways of providing alternatives to jail for nonviolent drug abusers and mentally ill people?

All of these are questions need to be asked, but the ball is in the court of opponents.

Something must be done to solve the overcrowding at the jail and time is running out.

If the delegation doesn't move quickly, county staff and inmates may be put at jeopardy.

If people have better, less expensive ways of solving the problems, that's great. We are all ears. But they better come forward soon.